



Ignatia Broker

Biography

Ignatia Broker was a member of the Ojibwe tribe, the Ottertail Pillager Band, and the A-wa-sa-si Clan. Daughter of Emma Broker and John Work Broker, she was born on February 14, 1919 at Pine Point on White Earth Indian Reservation. Her schooling began at a military style boarding school called Whapelton Indian School in North Dakota. She stayed at that school until 1933, her tenth grade year, when she transferred to the Haskell Indian Institute of Lawrence, Kansas.

She began her senior year of high school in Park Rapids, Minnesota, and she graduated from West High School in Minneapolis, Minnesota. After high school, she attended North Star College in Warren, Minnesota. She was then trained as a civilian employee of the Army Signal Corps. After her training was completed, she was sent to Hanford, Washington where she worked until 1945. Following this, she returned to Minneapolis where she attended the Minnesota School of Business and looked for a job. This was difficult due to the fierce discrimination she encountered at the time. She worked for a short time at the Minneapolis Star and Tribune before she began her career with the Minneapolis Public Schools in 1966. As a member of the Minority Task Force, she aided in the development of the Title IV Indian Studies Curriculum. As a staff writer for the Audio Visual Based Indian Resource Unit (AVBIRU) of the Minneapolis Public Schools, she authored many of the stories, filmstrips, and booklets that are a part of the curriculum today. A few examples of this are her poster story entitled "Ahmik Nishgadahzee," an Ojibwe legend about a beaver retold by Broker and illustrated by Bambi Goodwin, and "Weegwahsimitig," a short story about a birch tree.

Quick Facts

- * 1919-1987
- * Member of the Ojibwe tribe
- * Wrote *Night Flying Woman*, a novel about her great-great-grandmother

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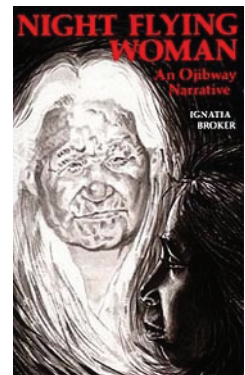


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Beyond her involvement in the school district, she was also a member of many Indian organizations. In 1970, she began to work with the Upper Midwest American Indian Center, where she was head of the research staff from 1971 to 1972. She founded the Minnesota American Indian Historical Society. Other organizations she devoted her time to include the National Indian Council on Aging, the Ikwe Marketing Collective, Indian Upward Bound, Council of Native Americans, Concerned Indian Citizens, and the Indian AFDC group. Locally, she participated in the American Indian Center in south Minneapolis, Urban Indian Federation of the State of Minnesota, and the Division of Indian Work of the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches. In 1984, she accepted one of fourteen national awards given by the Wonder Woman foundation in acknowledgement of her personal accomplishments in the face of adversity.

Broker wrote only one novel in her lifetime, *Night Flying Woman: An Ojibway Narrative*, which she began working on in 1969. It was not published until 1983. The story is about her great-great-grandmother, Ni-bo-wi-se-gwe, also known as Oona, and the great changes that happened to her and her people with the coming of the white settlers. The story emphasizes the necessity of change as well as the importance of remembering the past. Although things were very hard for her people at this time and the white settlers were trying to assimilate them, they could survive if they held on to their beliefs and traditions. She wrote this book with young people in mind. She wanted to be able to pass the Ojibwe ways on to them and keep the traditions alive in the hearts of the young. For this reason, the book is written in simple terms.



Broker begins the story by telling a little about her own life experiences and hardships when she first came to Minneapolis to live. She tells of the discrimination the Native Americans faced and of how they helped each other out and eventually triumphed despite the hardships. Their struggle parallels that of Oona and her kinspeople soon after their removal to the White Earth Reservation in that both groups relied on their strong sense of community sharing to become adjusted to the new situations. She begins telling about Oona because her children come to her to find out more about their peoples' past, so that they could tell the stories to their own children. The idea of keeping the past alive through generations by oral communication is one of the most important messages of the novel.



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Throughout her life, Ignatia Broker strived to make life a little easier for her people. With the publication of her book, she made it possible for the stories of Oona and the old ways to live on forever. She died of lung cancer on June 23, 1987, but she will be remembered for all she did to broaden the horizons of so many people and to break down the walls of discrimination. We can make a fairer world by showing the young the harsh reality.

Selected Bibliography

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